

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Acts 1:1-11

*<sup>1</sup> In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them for forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

*<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*

A fellow, reflecting upon his ancestry one day, determined to go to Russia for a visit. Why not? Must be an interesting place. However, when he tried to do some business in the black-market. He was quickly arrested by the police and imprisoned.

When he was brought before the judge, he was informed that doing business with the black market was a terrible crime to society, since the people suffer from the inability of the government to collect taxes and the punishment was well known, death.

Although he protested that he was a foreigner, the judge refused to reduce the sentence.

"The government is trying to stamp out the black market. We have no mercy on people who come here and disregard our laws. However, you are a foreigner, and we do want to encourage foreigners to come here as tourists and to do business, legally, of course. We want to show the world that the Russian legal system has mercy. Therefore, we will allow you three wishes. Anything that you desire, just ask and you shall be granted them. The only condition is that you cannot request to commute your death sentence. After your three wishes have been granted, you will have to pay for your crime."

"Well, if that is what I have left to do with my life, my first request is to go skiing in the Carpathian Mountains."

"What?" the judge remarked, "skiing? This is the summer ... there isn't any snow now."

"Well," the fellow answered, folding his arms across his chest, "I'm prepared to wait. Because that's my first wish."

"Let it be so!" The judge banged his gavel on the desk and called the police. "When the snow falls on the Carpathian Mountains, you are to fetch this fellow and let him ski to his heart's content, from sunrise until sunset. Afterwards he is to be brought to me to complete his sentencing."

Six months later the police came to collect the man and took him up to the most beautiful ski resort high up on the Carpathian Mountains. The fellow skied all day and after night fall the police whisked him to the judge.

"The state has granted your first wish. What is your second?"

"Well, I always wanted to swim in the Black Sea. That is my second request."

"The Black Sea is frozen. It's winter now."

"Well," the fellow answered, "I'm prepared to wait."

The judge said banging down his gavel, "The police will come to you on a beautiful summer's day and escort you to the ocean where you will swim to your hearts content from sunrise until sunset. Then you will be brought here to complete the sentencing."

On a beautiful summer's day, the police took him to the nicest resort on the Black Sea. The man swam the entire day and then after sunset, was ushered in front of the judge.

"The state has kept it's word. Now you may have your last wish, after which you will be executed."

"Well," the man began, "nothing could please me more than to be buried in a cemetery alongside of you."

"What?" the judge said, "but I'm not dead yet. How could we do that?"

"I don't know, but I'm prepared to wait."

Sometimes, it just pays to wait. The scripture we are using to help us think about waiting is the text about the Ascension of Christ. The story we read from Acts takes place during a period of time between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension. We are told Jesus made several appearances to his disciples. He ate with them and taught them about the kingdom of God. He also commanded them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples wanted to know when this baptism of the Holy Spirit would occur. Jesus disappointed them when he told them: "It is not for you to know the times and dates the Father has set by his own authority." Jesus then gave them a promise and a mission. He said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." And with that, Jesus departed from this earth. He was taken to heaven in a cloud of glory.

In that moment...all of the excitement...all of the emotions...all of the confusion about what this all meant -- it all came to an end. A hush fell over the disciples. They were alone...looking to the sky. Jesus was gone.

The great events of the life and ministry – the death and resurrection – of Jesus were over. But...the great mission of the church had not yet begun. We are told that there were only about 120 people who believed in the resurrection of Jesus – a small number when compared to the thousands who had flocked to Him during his time on earth.

This small group would become the core of the church -- they would soon burst forth in a new flurry of activity -- the church soon would explode across the Roman world -- but for that moment in time there was a small group of people – most likely a group of exhausted and confused individuals waiting for what was to come next.

What do you do when you are waiting on God to do or say something? We have all had times when we've waited for God. At this time of year students like your grandchildren and great-grandchildren are graduating from high school and college...there are those who have a firm sense of direction and purpose. But there are others who are at a loss and do not have a clear vision of the future. They may be waiting for God to act and give them some sense of direction.

Or you might think of someone, perhaps a son or daughter, in the middle of life who loses their job suddenly because the place where they work is closing. They wonder what they are going to do now. What do you do when you are waiting for God to speak?

There are people who are waiting for God to bring healing. In some physical or psychological way, they are suffering. And they are waiting for God to come alleviate the pain.

Think of the person cast into the depth of depression... and now life has no purpose...no meaning...no joy. Think of those who feel their life is out of control, and they are waiting for God to restore calm...to restore order...to restore purpose and joy. Maybe you are feeling this way today. What do you do when you are waiting for God to act?

There are people who are waiting for God to restore relationships. There are people who are waiting for God to provide the gift of forgiveness. Have you ever been in a situation when you wanted the forgiveness of someone you have hurt? You do everything you can to say I am sorry and to make things right and that person simply will not forgive you...and you are left waiting for God to soften that person's heart.

Or perhaps you have had the situation where you carry some terrible grudge. You may know that living in anger is like living with a cancer. You know that the anger eats away at the soul...just like cancer eats away at the body. But for some reason you just cannot get over it. You cannot bring yourself to say the simple words: I forgive you. You are waiting on God to equip you with the serenity and the strength to say those simple words – and really to mean what you say. What do you do when you are waiting on God like that?

There are people who are waiting for faith. They truly want to believe...and yet something is standing in the way. It might be someone who is afraid to die ...someone who has heard the promise of life everlasting with the Lord...but somehow is still afraid...still separated from true belief. That person is waiting for God to build true faith in them. What do you do when you are waiting for God like that?

There are those who are waiting for justice and peace. There are many wars going on in our world...terrorist groups killing people...violence in our cities and towns. There are people in our own country who are homeless and hungry. There are people around the globe in desperate struggles to feed their children. What do we do when we are waiting for God to bring justice and peace to this troubled world?

What do we do while we are waiting for God? First, we can hold onto the promises of the Scripture: God will act in His time. Jesus told the disciples: “It is not for you to know the times or the dates that the Father has set by his own authority.” God will act. He always does...in his way...in his time...in His wisdom.

Isaiah the Prophet reminds us of God's authority: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. And you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. Isaiah reminds us that the Lord has his time. The Lord will act in his time. The Lord will restore all things in his time.

Second, waiting for God should be a time of practical action. The Book of Acts tells us that the disciples took care of some business. For example, after Jesus had ascended, Peter tells

the disciples that they needed to replace Judas. So, they took care of that. Our own times of waiting for God should also be a very practical time.

If we are waiting for God to provide direction in our life activities – we can do something very practical while we wait. We can investigate our options. We can talk to other people and listen to their suggestions. We can pray for guidance. These are practical things we can do while we wait.

Third...the time of waiting should be a time of reflection. I imagine that the disciples used the ten-day period between the Ascension to Pentecost for reflection on all of the events they had witnessed and experienced.

The waiting time provides such a wonderful opportunity to stop...to reflect...to gain some perspective on what has happened in life. To go on to the future that God has in store for us, we need to understand and become reconciled with the past. The waiting time is such a wonderful time for that type of reflection.

Fourth, the time of waiting can be a time to deepen our faith. God helps us build faith in many ways...but one way is in our communion with the Lord and with each other. Through worship, bible study, prayer, the communion...and doing this together...our faith deepens.

The times we wait on God can be turned into beneficial opportunities. When we find ourselves waiting, the worse thing we could do is throw our hands in the air...and say, “No way God!” and then try to take matters into our own hands.

There’s a story about a family who had an unexpected house guest one Christmas. A squirrel had fallen into the wood burner stove in the basement of their home in Michigan.

They thought that if the squirrel knew someone was there to help, one of them could just reach in and gently lift it out. Nothing doing. As one member of the family reached in, the squirrel began to scratch to get out like it had overdosed on espresso.

Finally, they managed to construct a cardboard box “cage” complete with a large hole in one side, into which the squirrel waltzed when they placed the box against the wood burner’s door. They let it out into the safety of their backyard.

Isn’t it funny how, before its redemption, the squirrel frantically tried to bash its way out of its dark prison? It seemed that the harder it struggled to get free, the more pain it caused itself. In the end, it had to wait until one who was bigger...one who could peer into its world...could carry it to that larger world where it really belonged. That is what the Lord will do for us...if we just wait.